

An episode in the War of Independence recalled by Captain Michael Quirke

THE BATTLE OF KILMALLOCK

The successful attack on the R.I.C. Barracks in Ballylanders on the night of the 27th April, 1920, put great heart into the I.R.A. in Limerick and in Tipperary. The booty, which was secured after the taking of this enemy stronghold, consisted of seven carbines, five Webley revolvers, some hundreds of rounds of .303 ammunition, and some few rounds of .45 revolver ammunition. This was a most welcome addition to our armament, which was very low indeed. It was felt that this resource, together with the experience which we had gained in this type of fighting, enabled us to take on a much stronger force of the enemy. It was almost immediately decided that we would attack and capture Kilmallock R.I.C. Barrack.

Our intelligence service was at once put to work on this attack with the object of ascertaining its full strength, the disposition for defence, and the routine and movements of the garrison. It was discovered that the normal strength of the barracks consisted of two sergeants and 18 men. The barracks was a very substantial one, and all the windows were steel-shuttered and rendered bomb-proof on the outside by means of wire netting. In addition to a plentiful supply of ammunition, the garrison was well provided with rifle grenades and Mills bombs. In short, the police were in the position of an exceptionally strong military force with every prospect of holding out for days against even overwhelming numbers.

Garrison

With regard to the movements of the garrison it was learned that, whilst normally the strength was two sergeants and eighteen constables, this number varied almost nightly. Individual R.I.C. men came and departed by train on special plain clothes duty. Occasionally they came by Crossley tender, so that it was never possible to say accurately what was the strength of the garrison on a particular night. In point of fact, it so happened that on the night of the attack the garrison consisted of twenty-eight men.

Nerve-racking

Midway between Kilross and Kilmnane, at a place called Garryspillane, I observed in the distance the rapid approach of two military lorries carrying British soldiers and R.I.C. men. There was no possible means of avoiding them, as I had nowhere to turn, and was within their vision as soon as they were in mine. They were a remarkable unobtrusive patrol.



Captain Michael Quirke (seated left) is pictured with this happy group of the first Gardaí stationed in Croom in 1923. He was appointed O/C military post at Croom Garda station in 1923. A native of Moorabally, Galbally, he had a distinguished record in the fight for independence, and took part in many noble engagements. He joined the Army in 1922 and on his retirement 25 years later was appointed supervisor of stores with the Army Air Corps at Baldonnell recently.

The two cyclists were allowed to pass unnoticed, and were too far ahead in my case to have given me successful warning of their approach. Luckily, they did not attempt any signal, but simply cycled past. As the lorries approached, I jumped down off the cart, and ran to the horse's head, holding my hand up at the same time for the lorries to slow down. The horse was naturally mettlesome, and I judged it best to put on a bold front, and take full advantage of the horse's restlessness. The lorries considerably enough slowed down and stopped (which was more than I bargained for) and two soldiers and one R.I.C. man got off a lorry and came over and assisted me to lead the horse to the rear of the cars.

Needless to say, I thanked them profusely for their kindness, and left no time in getting on the cart and hastening on my way. It was a nerve-racking few minutes. What trifles great events turn upon! Had my two comrades been the proper distance ahead, they would almost certainly have given some kind of warning, which would in all probability have been observed by the oncoming enemy, and their suspicions aroused with fatal consequences. Again, had the R.I.C. man when he was down on the road, evinced any curiosity, discovery was almost inevitable. However, the rest of the journey was made without incident, and I deposited the ammunition in Clancy's, quite convenient to the town of Kilmnane.

The rifles, some ammunition, and all available shot-guns were dumped on the western side of Kilmallock, under the personal supervision of Brigadier Sean Forde; the greater portion of ammunition, bombs and explosives, was dumped on the eastern side under the supervision of Comdt. Lynch.

It was too much to hope that so strong a barrack could be carried by a short, sharp attack. It would obviously have to be besieged. This constituted the greatest part of our task, because a protracted fight would certainly lead to the possibility of reinforcements coming to the relief of the garrison. Our force was too small for the risk to be regarded lightly.

Held

All available help in the entire district was accordingly mobilised at 6 o'clock on the night of the attack, and all main roads, bye-roads, and railway tracks for a radius of about 15 miles around Kilmallock were rendered impassable for any form of traffic. A prodigious amount of labour went into this work, but it was voluntarily, cheerfully and effectively done, and it was well indeed that it was so, for the barrack proved a far tougher proposition even than we had counted upon.

All preliminaries having been completed, the mobilisation of the attackers began. At 8 o'clock on the night of May 27, 1920, eighteen men from my battalion concentrated at Garryspillane cross-roads, all in possession of bicycles, and proceeded to Kilmallock direct, to join forces with other detachments from West Limerick and East Clare. Amongst these eighteen were the Scanlons and O'Briens, of Galbally; the Crowleys and Crawfords, of Ballylanders; Sean Lynch, Liam Fraher, Ned Tobin, Denny Hanigan and Denny Lacey, all of whom in later years distinguished themselves in the Active Service Units which operated in the East Limerick and South Tipperary areas.

Directed their main efforts against Clery's Hotel. They endeavoured to make this post untenable by a continuous attack with rifle grenades. In this they were considerably handicapped by our elevated position and the fact that the street space between the two buildings was filled with dense smoke. Owing largely to these facts, I believe, they failed to get a single one of their grenades in through any of the windows occupied by us. None the less, our position was rather precarious. Grenade after grenade hit the front wall, dropped to the ground and burst with terrific force. These repeated concussions were causing considerable damage to the lower portion of the front of the hotel.

Stubborn

The first pale fingers of the summer dawn were now beginning to lighten the summer sky. The fight had been waged for over five hours and the entire barrack was little better than a roaring furnace. The position of the defenders was hopeless, as it was quite impossible to conceive human beings able to remain any longer in the building. Once more the "Cease fire" signal flashed out. Silence again took the place of conflict. The garrison, for the last time, were called upon to "surrender." The answer was "never," followed by a few shots.

The fight then recommenced and was continued up to about a quarter to six o'clock. About the entire roof fell in, amid frantic cheering from the defenders. The position of the defenders was hopeless, as it was quite impossible to conceive human beings able to remain any longer in the building. Once more the "Cease fire" signal flashed out. Silence again took the place of conflict. The garrison, for the last time, were called upon to "surrender." The answer was "never," followed by a few shots.

The retreat of the R.I.C. led to a change of our position also. We evacuated our former posts and got into new ones at the rear without suffering any casualties, although it was now almost daylight. The fact that the R.I.C. had abandoned most of their reserve of ammunition, etc., in their flight from the barrack conferred no great advantage on us. We had begun our attack with a pitifully small supply of ammunition and bombs, and, after more than six hours continuous fighting, our supplies were well nigh exhausted. Thus, it was about 7 a.m. when we had exhausted our supplies of ammunition, and were in grave danger of being trapped by heavy reinforcements, our leader was forced to sound the "Retire." We fired a parting volley and began our retirement.

Meanwhile, the fight was raging fiercely all around the barrack. The large garrison had manned every loop-hole, and was returning a hot fire to our attack. It looked as if we would not succeed in forcing our way into the barrack, or, at least, in a direct assault. The bombing of the petrol-soaked roof, upon which great hopes had been set, did not appear to be working out as planned, and it was clear that unless some other means of reducing the structure of the building was brought into play, it was evident that bomb and rifle fire would be unavailing.

Furnace

It was under those conditions that the real genius of our leader rose to the occasion. He detailed a small party of men, guarding the exits, to proceed to a yard in the town where there was an American paraffin oil car. The car had arrived in the evening and put into one of the yards, the driver staying overnight in the town. It was the tank-shaped type so commonly used in distributing supplies to country traders, and contained a huge quantity of paraffin oil. This car was now brought up the street, and with considerable difficulty and danger, placed in a juxta-position to the barracks. By means of a hose, this supply of paraffin was now poured into the breach in the roof. For the best part of an hour the stream of paraffin was kept playing on the roof, with the result that in a few minutes it became a roaring furnace.

Died

It was during this time that poor Liam Scully met his death. Too brave and daring, he repeatedly engaged the defenders, and was fatally wounded. For some time previously, he had been my close companion in the fight against the Crown Forces, and a great intimacy had sprung up between us. We placed him, wounded and dying, on top of the empty arms, where he lay for some time, or until he was dead. He was a fine fellow, and a great loss to our cause. He was a native of Kerry, and was a very brave and loyal man. He was a great help to us in many ways, and his death was a great blow to us.

Ruin

We retired in good order across the country, leaving the barracks a smouldering ruin. Had the attack started half an hour earlier, or had we another half-dozen grenades in our possession, we could have reduced the out-building and compelled the R.I.C. to surrender, or die fighting in the open. However, we could, without exaggeration, claim that we had accomplished what we set out to do, namely, to reduce the enemy's stronghold in the town of Kilmallock.

known fact locally that three others were killed and burned beyond recognition in the flagration of the barracks. Our losses were one killed—poor Liam Scully. The R.I.C. sergeant who was responsible for inducing his men to hold out to the bitter end was promoted to the rank of District-Inspector the following week, but was shot dead in Listowel a few weeks later. Savage reprisals were carried out next night, and some of the most prominent buildings in Kilmallock were reduced to ashes. It is needless to say, the people who suffered these fatalities had nothing whatever to do with the attack, as sometimes happens in reprisals.

Why not try this scheme in Limerick?

A PROJECT aimed at giving farm folk time off has been launched by Macra na Feirme.

The scheme provides relief milkers. It has been pioneered by the South Tipperary Executive of Macra na Feirme and went into operation a month ago. I viewed the service at first hand last week when I visited the operators and talked to the organisers, who have been overwhelmed with enquiries.

Mr. Pat O'Dwyer of Ardmon, near Tipperary town, chairman of the executive, told me: "We have been looking at the need for farm services of this kind for some time and because of the dairying areas we decided to start with a relief milking scheme."

"The main objective is to provide a complete relief milk service for farmers in South Tipperary by building up a corps of young lads and training them to be ready to take over on any farm, and with any amount of notice, whenever a farmer needs them. "We saw too that this could be operated by a number of young farmers at home on farms who would benefit from being trained to do a farm task properly. "In this way I saw that we could provide a social service for farmers who need it and at the same time provide education, training and experience for young farmers that would benefit them."

Five members of the executive have been appointed to administer the scheme, which so far has only two operators available, but plans to cover the entire area of South Tipperary within a year or 18 months. A training centre, that might be used for other areas of the country as well as the home county, has been established.

LIMERICK JUNCTION RACES

On Thursday, August 19, in connection with above, Cheap Day Excursion tickets will be issued on the 16.00 train from Limerick. Timetable and Standard Class Day Return Fares will be: DEPART: Limerick 16.00 55p Limerick Jctn. arr ... 16.31

Return train from Junction at 21.00 (17-14c)	CIE
--	-----

EXCURSION TO DUBLIN

On Sunday, August 22, in connection with the All-Ireland Football semi-final: Senior, Cork v. Galway and Minor, Co. v. Dublin at Croke Park. A special train with Buffet Car will be provided from Rathfriland at 09.58. Timetable and Standard Class Day Return Fares will be: Depart: Rathfriland 09.58 2.40 Malrow 10.12 2.30 Buttavant 10.27 2.10 Rathfriland 10.40 2.10 Kilmallock 10.49 2.00 Knocknong 11.00 1.90 Hueston Station (Kingsbridge) arr. 12.05 Return train from Hueston Station at 20.00.

"We are insisting that they take the same interest in the herd they are handling as if they were their own. They must take the same responsibility as if the farmer himself was there and if they are not prepared to do this, or if we have any complaints, they will have to go because they are no use to this scheme. "We have underlined this on the form of application and we are guaranteeing the farmer that the cows will be the same on his return as when he left them and this is something that we all regard as of utmost importance. The service is booked through telephoning any of the five executive members, but alternative arrangements a day off. The operator has to collect the cows from the field, check

NOTICE BY THE Revenue Commissioners

The Revenue Commissioners desire to draw the attention of users of marked gas oil (that is gas oil, coloured with red dye), to the legal requirements that tanks containing such marked oil, must be indelibly marked to the effect that such oil is not to be used for combustion in the engine of a motor vehicle, or kept in the fuel tank of such vehicle. Dublin Castle, August, 1971. (14-20-27c)

DISTRICT MEDICAL OFFICER

Applications are invited from General Practitioners for the post of part-time District Medical Officer in the Caherdavin/Ennis Road/Greystones area, Limerick. Details of the position, including travel facilities provided, are available from: Chief Medical Officer, Tralee, 10, Back's Walk, Dublin 1. (14c)

SAVOY
COMMENCING
NEXT SUNDAY
(Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult)
Daily at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.
Adm.: 40p, 35p, 30p and 25p
Children 25p to both performances

He was King, She was barely 18.
And in their thousand days they played out the most passionate and shocking love story in history!

"I've stabbed and fought and dined... I've loved and plundered... ripped and torn the bodies of my friends... to find the heart of the woman I love..."

RICHARD BURTON
GENEVIEVE BUJOLD
HAL WALLIS presents
Anne of the Thousand Days
IRENE PAPAS
ANTHONY QUAYLE JOHN COLICOS
(11-14c)

PAULINE'S - The Hat Shop
113 Henry Street, Limerick — Tel. 44502
(Two doors from Franciscan Church)

- WEDDING HATS FOR EVERYONE
- PETAL SCARF HATS (all shades)—£1
- HAT SALE—HATS FROM 49p
- MINK TIES—16 GNS.
- OPEN ALL DAY THURSDAY

WHY PAY RENT? — When you can Invest in
COMMERCIAL PROPERTY
ENNIS — SHANNON — LIMERICK Telephone: LIMERICK 47133 :: Telephone: ENNIS 21017
(Jul.10-Aug.11-Sept.11-26-Oct.9,23)